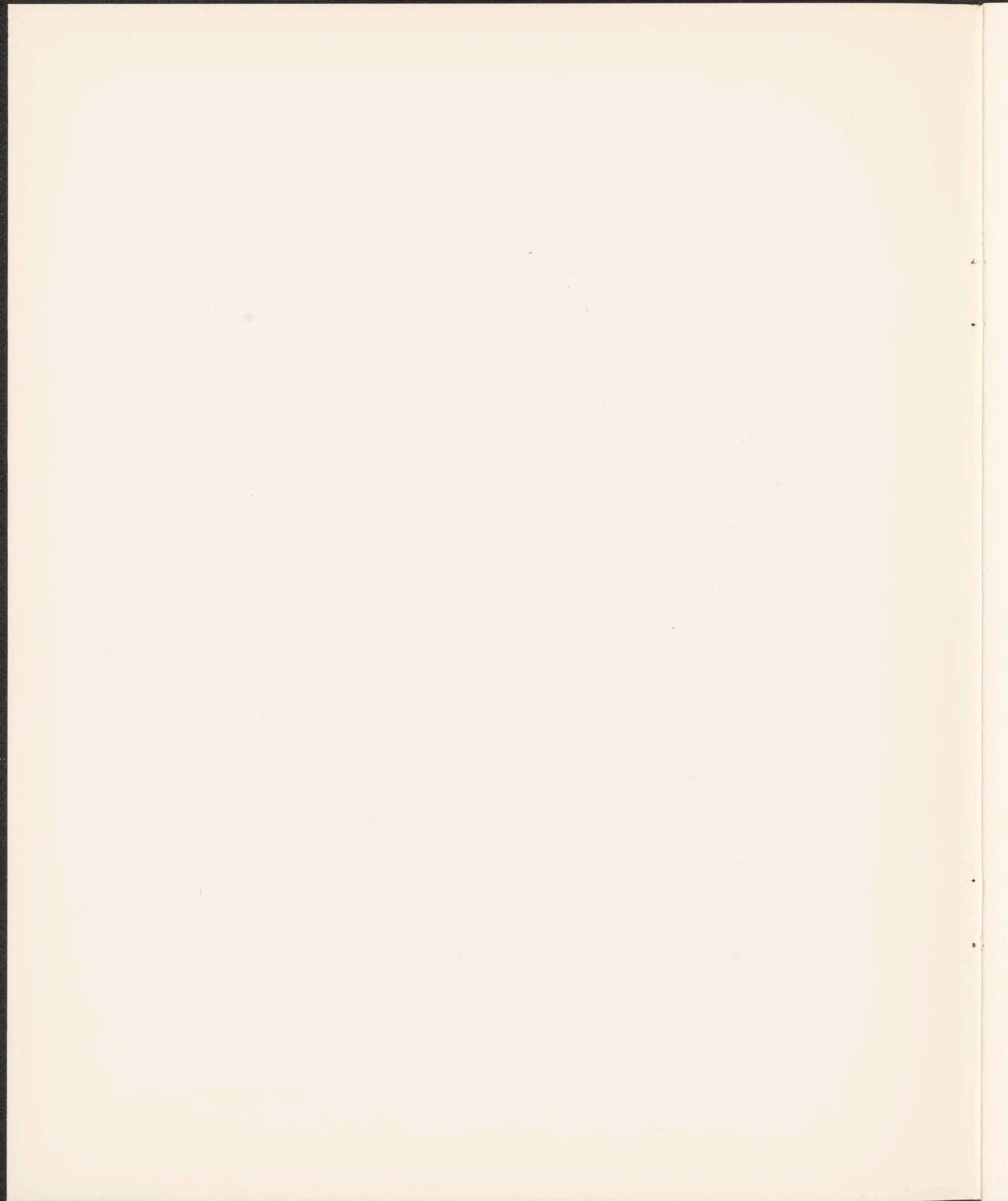


MODERN PAINTERS AT THE CORCORAN



BRUCE BOICE



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Clair Z. List, Associate Curator of Contemporary Art

MARCH 24 – MAY 20, 1984

THE CORCORAN GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON, D.C.

2. *The Birth of Tiberius*, 1983. Oil on canvas, 82 x 72",
Courtesy John Weber Gallery, New York City.





Clair List When you start a paper piece, is it with the intention that it will probably translate to a canvas painting?

Bruce Boice Not necessarily. A lot of times I realize I like it the way it is but I'd also like to see what evolves, to keep going on it, then that's when I decide to make a painting. Sometimes I like them the way they are and there's no reason to do a painting. "Paper Tangier" is like that.

CL When you do translate the paper piece to the canvas, what kind of differences come about usually? Is there a totally different challenge?

BB No, the main difference is the paper is against the wall and so there is a hard surface on which to work and it's clumsier for me because I'm used to the texture, the thickness of the canvas and, therefore, I bump into the wall with my brush all the time. The wall is there before you think it's going to be there.

CL Have you always painted on the wall? Did you ever paint on the floor?

BB The "Serial System" pieces from the late 1970's were all done on the floor.

CL What got you back to the wall?

BB Being done with those and deciding to stop having rules and trying to make regular, at least what I perceived as regular, old-fashioned abstract paintings.

CL How many paintings do you work on at a time?

BB Usually, two or three.

CL Is it difficult for you to tell when they are finished? Are you constantly re-working certain pieces?

BB It varies. Sometimes I know it's finished. Usually, even then, I give it a few days to see if I still think it's finished. Othertimes I waiver more than that and I'll say, "It might be finished," and I'll keep looking at it and I decide, "No, it's not done yet," and then I do some more to it. "The Birth of Tiberius" went through being finished a couple of times.

CL And what changed? Was it the palette that wasn't right? Didn't certain forms fit compositionally? Or was there a little too much chaos?

BB Sometimes it will have to do with color; often it will have to do with the drawing. In this case, it was very close to being done for a long time, it just sat there for quite awhile with my not knowing if I was going to do anything more or not. Then I realized that there was too much difference between the top and the bottom of the painting in terms of density of little events.

CL Did you work out these changes on paper or on a sketch book or did you actually work them out on the canvas?

BB I believe the changes were done right on the canvas.

CL Is that usually how you make your changes?

BB I'll do it either way. I'll make a lot of changes on the paper—on the drawing—and a lot of times I don't pay any attention to the drawing. Again, it varies. I used to work pretty consistently—almost always from the drawing. I'd make changes on the drawing to see what was going on, then I'd make them on the painting. But in the last year and a half or so, the



drawings have started to be less and less an important part of the creative process. I still do them, but even now I'm not sure how much I need them. I never use a drawing for the paper pieces, which is probably why the drawings have diminished in interest.

CL Do you feel that these are transitional paintings in a way?

BB They always seem transitional to me.

CL Did you come to an end with your previous style: that is, you completed the cycle and there was no where else to go? I was wondering if you see that with this group at all?

BB No, these are different. These aren't involved with ideas—the other paintings were.

CL Were they much more conceptual?

BB Yes, and there was a logical structure to them. I guess that I came to the end of it, I was tired of the structure and it started getting in my way. Also, the paintings kept getting more and more elaborate, and I noticed that I was more interested in what was happening in the newer paintings than I was in anything about the structure and how it all worked conceptually. Yes, they did come to an end. These new pieces are different: One evolves out of another and I don't see an end to them because of that factor. I never have ideas for them; I don't work from ideas anymore.

CL How about palette?

BB The palette shifts all the time. In fact, it shifts constantly just on one painting. I'll gray them one day and make them predominately red another and then they'll be real light and then they'll get dark.

CL How do you stop? How do you say, "That's enough, I've had it, I'm finished?"

BB When I feel absolutely happy with the painting.

CL And every aspect of it works and holds together?

BB When I'm excited, and when it holds together in a very exciting way. A lot of times a painting holds together and it's boring.

CL Do you find that sometimes they get out of control?

BB Yes, when I'm working on them.

CL It seems to me there would be a very fine line, with your paintings, between order and chaos.

BB There is. In fact, there's a lot of order and chaos in my mind, too. Somedays you have a feeling and things just seem to work, to click, everything you do seems to be right. Most of the time I am very conscious of having no idea of what I'm doing, or even what to do next.

CL It's intuitive and it happens, it flows?

BB It is intuitive. When it happens, you realize you don't know what to do but you've got to do something because it isn't right the way it is. Sometimes the best things come forth when you just start working on the painting.

CL Would you say that painting is an agonizing process for you? Do you enjoy it or don't you think about it in that way?

BB I enjoy it. Sometimes I get very tense doing it; about once every two weeks, I have to stop for five minutes and lie down. I get a little sick to my stomach; the anxiety is

6. *Heat*, 1983, Oil on canvas, 82 x 78",
Courtesy John Weber Gallery, New York City.



overwhelming and then I see something, I have a way out.

CL Have you kept your earlier paintings? Are they around? Do you look at them?

BB I think there is a sample of about forty "Systems" paintings in storage.

CL Do you ever go back and look at them?

BB No.

CL Are they inspirational to you at this point at all?

BB No.

CL Are you glad to be through with that phase of your career?

BB Yes, in a way, they're a little embarrassing to me.

CL Do you see how the newer pieces evolved from those?

BB First of all, obviously, those were very current in the early 70's but also, what I found out, was that like a lot of other artists who tagged along with minimal art, I wanted to do abstract painting but none of it made sense to me anymore. There didn't seem to be a reason for anything: you put color down; the shapes looked nice but it just didn't seem to matter. Part of the appeal of the logical structure was to give it some sense of significance, that is, this element is here for this reason, etc. I guess that work went on for about five years, and by the end of it I was aware I didn't need a reason anymore which is how this current work developed because they don't have a reason. The newer pieces are arbitrary and that's fine with me. The fact that they are arbitrary doesn't mean they will be without significance.

CL Arbitrary in what sense?

BB There's no justification for why this should be pink and have that shape, at least not something I could verbalize. Visually, to me, there is a reason, and when it arrives at that stage, I know the painting is done.

CL I would think that must be a relief. That's quite a load to have gotten rid of.

BB It was wonderful to get rid of it.

CL Was it difficult to justify to yourself that it's alright not to have such grandiose concepts behind the paintings?

BB By the time I did it, it was not hard at all.

CL Did you question yourself personally? Was something going on in your personal life that, perhaps, allowed you to loosen up in this way?

BB No, I don't think so. The earlier paintings just came to an end and I started to understand that I was getting much more interested in the formal elements of these conceptual paintings than in any other aspect of them. Certainly, that helped. I think probably the hardest part is, you're always a little confused when something changes. You stop and suddenly you're facing this vacuum. If I don't have this structure, what do I do? Plus, there's an identification problem that feels funny. I've been creating these paintings that had this certain basic look to them and now there's nothing to identify me with what I do.

CL You mean with other artists?

BB Yes.

CL These are much freer than what I first saw in the studio. The jagged forms are much

more free-flowing, softer and more curvilinear. What brought this about?

BB Initially, these paintings were composed of straight lines because I used a straight edge. About a year after I started doing these, in 1978, I was trying to get curves in a painting called "Manual."

CL And where did the curve come from? It just felt right?

BB I didn't really end up with curves in it. But there were some bends. The main difference it made, which is why I called it "Manual," was that I stopped using the straight edge. Gradually, I just got to feel them out and for awhile the curves got to be pretty baroque and loopy and now they're probably a little more organic. I don't normally think of them as organic although I recognize that they are. I think of them as having the shapes open up and vary as much as possible.

CL Do you usually start in one area and let the painting grow? Is it different every time? Do you have a formula for beginning?

BB My starting point doesn't usually matter so much; what matters is that I just want to get the canvas covered with paint, to have something there. This one was based on three different Raphael cartoons for tapestries—black and white reproductions in a book. It's pretty hard to find any of it now.

CL How important is it for the viewer to know that the starting point was the Raphael?

BB Not important at all. It's a curiosity, it has no importance whatsoever to me, as far as the painting goes. Usually you can see the correlation there once I show the source. It's just a place to start that gives me a different kind of space.

CL Would you say that the organization of the composition is the most important aspect of your painting?

BB Yes, the organization of the space, and, naturally, the color and density of the shape. Space is really what painting is all about for me and trying to create an exciting space in which you don't quite know where anything is.

CL Tell me about your titles. Where do they come from?

BB Sometimes I don't know what to call a painting. A painting is done and I haven't thought about it and so it'll sit around for a week or two and something will come up. A lot of times the title will have to do with its source. The "Lunch" paintings are from "Dejeuner Sur L'Herbe" and "The Birth of Tiberius" is because our kitten is named Tiberius. "Cat House" comes from the Picasso "Charnel House" drawings—at least the central portion of it. The "Livia" paintings are both from the Poussin "Death of Germanicus" who was killed by Livia. Livia is also the name of our mother cat. "Circle Line" was named because of these ads in New York for the Circle Line—the boat around Manhattan. The funny ads state: "A thrill a minute." At some point, Jan looked at the painting and said, "You know, that's a thrill a minute." and I said, "Circle Line." It had a lot of circles in it anyhow.

CL What kind of interaction goes on between Jan Groover (the artist's wife) and you as far as your work is concerned? Does she come in and critique?

BB Well, she doesn't critique my work. She'll come in and say she really likes an area or

really likes what's going on. It's kind of funny, because the next time she comes in, it's gone. It's as if I did it because she liked it which isn't ever the case. Actually, if she really likes an area—and a lot of times I'll have been about to get rid of it—I'll maybe adjust it in some way.

CL Do you have friends or other artists that do come in and look at your work and talk to you about it?

BB No.

CL Are you fairly private in your studio?

BB I allow people in the studio, but usually they don't talk to me about my work because I think they get the idea that I don't want them to.

CL Is that a New York phenomenon?

BB I don't know. I think everyone's probably different about it. A lot of people want feedback, but I don't like it at all.

CL Have you ever?

BB No. I get real nervous about it. I always feel that I know about these paintings—I know how I feel about them and that's all that matters.

CL How do you feel about showing them publicly?

BB Oh, I like that.

CL Is that a pleasant experience or is that a nervous time?

BB I always compare it to a birthday. There's always this anticipation of your birthday as this special, magical day, and it's very exciting. But then it happens, and the focus gets a little nerve-racking. I mean the focus on you. But, yes, I like it.

CL How will it feel to come back into the studio when all of these paintings are gone? Do you have trouble with that?

BB No, because except for the ones I'm working on, they're all just piled up anyway.

CL How did you get this large format?

BB It's the biggest size that I can get in the door. My sizes, at this point, have become fairly standard and there's not much I can do about it except get wider or shorter. I like a basic rectangle.

CL Define abstraction.

BB Not representational.

CL Struggle against representation? Or the opposite?

BB When we're talking about art and abstract art or abstraction, all it really means is elements don't look like things in the world. It's not a more superior form of painting, to me, than representational art, it's simply different. It's not grounded in the world in that way and that presents a problem. There's nothing to say it should be this shape or that color and so it's a lot more open. At the same time you're not tied down to these rules of how it should be.

CL When you use representational painting as a source aren't you bouncing off of the painting?

BB No, not at all. I never deal with representational space, and that's the real difference. You

3. *Cat House*, 1983, Oil on canvas, 78 x 82",
Courtesy John Weber Gallery, New York City.



can lengthen an arm or an ear but it's really the tricks in space that are the fanciest ones.

CL Would you say that you're a direct descendant of cubist theory of space?

BB I probably wouldn't say that. I'm interested in cubism but its space isn't as interesting, to me, as other kinds of space.

CL Such as?

BB Such as that of Raphael or Poussin, Picasso and Matisse. At this point, the most exciting painters to me, the very most exciting that I have in my mind all the time, are deKooning, Gorky and late Picasso.

CL Anyone more contemporary? I mean closer to your age?

BB No.

CL Do you constantly go to the galleries and museums to see what's going on?

BB It's not a policy, but I almost never go. I like going. It's stimulating to me but I tend not to get around to it.

CL Do you feel out of place with what's going on.

BB Yes.

CL Do you feel that you fit into the painting of the 1980's?

BB I don't feel as if I'm doing old work but I certainly don't fit into what people are doing these days. And it isn't even the expressionist subject-matter or expressionist point of view as much as the fact that those artists tend not to deal with space. Their work is all emblematic, it's pop and because of that I don't identify with them. But I also don't identify because I don't trust what other people are doing now. I certainly think it's more exciting than what was before and I even like some of it. However, I don't get the feeling that these people mean what they're doing; I don't get the feeling it means anything to them.

CL Be a little more specific.

BB I don't get the feeling, for instance, that when I see a show of Julian Schnabel's that he means it, that his work is urgent and really matters to him. He's found a few tricks and he knows how to make something powerful with the plates and with some rough stuff on velvet. But, he found out he doesn't have to take it to the limit. He realized that he could do anything and get away with it.

CL Do you find that painting for you is a calling or a career?

BB I think of it as the difference between one's life and a career. And to me it's my life.

CL Has it always been?

BB Yes. I'm probably more conscious of it now that I've been doing this basic kind of painting. My work occupies me in a way that it didn't used to.

CL Do you think that living and working in New York has effected your art in any way?

BB Yes, I think it's made me more confident.

CL Why?

BB Because when you're not in New York, I think you're always a little paranoid that you're not. You always feel you're missing something and that people know something you don't know. Being here, you just don't feel that.

10. *Paper Tangier*, 1983, Oil on paper, 62½ x 84",
Courtesy John Weber Gallery, New York City.



CL Do you see yourself always painting?

BB Yes, it would be a real shocker to wake up one morning and find out I didn't want to paint anymore. I think that would be about the most confusing thing in the world—beyond some incredible physical turn around in your life—like an automobile accident. I can't imagine not painting.

CL Are you fairly content?

BB Yes, most of the time.

CL Do you see the paintings continuing on as they are at this point?

BB No. At this point I think there's always a very general vision that I'm pushing towards, but I don't know what it looks like exactly. It's getting complicated to just keep opening it up as much as possible. I notice shifts—a loosening up of a gesture or line. I'm basically happy with where they are now. It's a moving finish line—you're never done.

CL That must be a good feeling though?

BB It's all open and that's a good feeling. It's always exciting to wonder what they'll be like in five years.

CL When you look back at these, will you still enjoy them?

BB You never know.

CATALOGUE OF THE EXHIBITION

1. *Saints*. 1982
Oil on canvas, each panel, 81 x 49"
Collection Exxon Corporation
2. *The Birth of Tiberius*. 1983
Oil on canvas, 82 x 72"
Courtesy John Weber Gallery, New York City
3. *Cat House*. 1983
Oil on canvas, 78 x 82"
Courtesy John Weber Gallery, New York City
4. *Circle Line*. 1983
Oil on canvas, 72 x 82"
Courtesy John Weber Gallery, New York City
5. *Collage*. 1983
Oil on canvas, 67½ x 61½"
Courtesy John Weber Gallery, New York City
6. *Heat*. 1983
Oil on canvas, 82 x 78"
Courtesy John Weber Gallery, New York City
7. *Livia I*. 1983
Oil on canvas, 73 x 83"
Courtesy John Weber Gallery, New York City
8. *No Heat*. 1983
Oil on canvas, 60 x 72"
Courtesy John Weber Gallery, New York City
9. *Paper Lunch*. 1983
Oil on paper, 45 x 52½"
Courtesy John Weber Gallery, New York City
10. *Paper Tangier*. 1983
Oil on paper, 62⅛ x 84"
Courtesy John Weber Gallery, New York City
11. *Untitled*. 1983
Oil on paper, 42½ x 45"
Courtesy John Weber Gallery, New York City
12. *Untitled*. 1983
Oil on paper, 62 x 72"
Courtesy John Weber Gallery, New York City
13. *Tapestry*. 1984
Oil on canvas, 78 x 82"
Courtesy John Weber Gallery, New York City

Bruce Boice

Born December 4, 1941, Boundbrook, New Jersey.

Studied Colgate University, Hamilton, New York, 1959–61; University of Hartford, Hartford, Connecticut, 1971–72.

Teaches School of Visual Arts, New York City, 1973–present.

Awarded National Endowment for the Arts grant, 1976, 1980; CAPS, 1979.

Lives in New York City.

Individual Exhibitions

New York City, Sonnabend Gallery, January 4–25, 1975.

Venice, Italy, Capricorno Gallery, August 1975.

Cologne, Germany, Galerie Ricke, October 1975.

Genova, Italy, Galleriaforma, November 1975.

Paris, France, Galerie Sonnabend, March 1976.

Brussels, Belgium, Galerie HM, March 1976.

Chicago, Illinois, Dart Gallery, May 21–June 30, 1976.

New York City, Sonnabend Gallery, October 9–30, 1976.

New York City, Sonnabend Gallery, November 5–26, 1977.

Boston, Massachusetts, Thomas Segal Gallery, October 7–November 1, 1978.

Hartford, Connecticut, RAW Gallery, November 1978.

New York City, Sonnabend Gallery, April 7–May 5, 1979.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Temple University, Tyler School of Art, September 22–October 8, 1979.

New York City, John Weber Gallery, February 6–27, 1982.

Bay Harbor Islands, Florida, Gloria Luria Gallery, April 8–29, 1983.

New York City, John Weber Gallery, February 4–25, 1984.

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By the Artist

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"After the Quality Problem," *Artforum*, February 1973, pages 73–75.

"Jan Dibbets: The Photograph and the Photographed," *Artforum*, April 1973, pages 45–49.

"The Axiom of Indifference," *Arts Magazine*, April 1973, pages 66–68.

"Dorothea Rockburne's New Work," Exhibition catalogue, the Harvard Art School, April 1973.

"Problems from Early Kupka," *Artforum*, January 1976, pages 32–39.

Selected Group Exhibitions

- New York City, Sonnabend Gallery, "Group Exhibition," June 24–July 30, 1974.
Leverkusen, Germany, Leverkusen Museum, "U.S.A. Zeichnungen 3," May 15–June 29, 1975.
- New York City, Sonnabend Gallery, "Group Exhibition," June 14–July 30, 1975.
Cleveland, Ohio, The New Gallery of Contemporary Art, "Works on Paper," October 11–November 8, 1975.
- Buffalo, New York, Hallwalls, "Approaching Painting, Part One," January 13–February 4, 1976.
- Syracuse, New York, Syracuse University, College of Visual and Performing Arts, Joe and Emily Lowe Art Gallery, "Contemporary Paintings: A Review of the New York Gallery Season, 1974–1975," January 22–February 22, 1976.
- Chicago, Illinois, Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, "Ideas on Paper 1970–1976," May 2–June 6, 1976.
- New York City, Sonnabend Gallery, "Group Exhibition," June 18–July 30, 1976.
- Miami, Florida, Miami-Dade Community College, "Boice-Baldessari," December 1976.
- Brockport, New York, State University of New York, "Recent Abstract Painting," 1976.
- Waltham, Massachusetts, Brandeis University, Rose Art Museum, "From Women's Eyes," May 1–June 12, 1977.
- New York City, Sonnabend Gallery, "Group Exhibition," June 1977.
- Cleveland, Ohio, The Cleveland Museum of Art, "Four Contemporary Painters: Arakawa, Bruce Boice, Ronald Davis, Agnes Martin," September 20–October 29, 1978.
- New York City, Sonnabend Gallery, "Group Exhibition," June 1979.
- New York City, Rosa Esman Gallery, "Painting and Structure," September 1979.
- New York City, John Weber Gallery, "Mind Set: An Ongoing Involvement with the Rational Tradition," December 2–22, 1979.
- Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, Bard College, Proctor Art Center, "Geometric Abstraction 1980," February 1980.
- Montgomery, Alabama, Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, "American Painting of the Sixties and Seventies," April 4–May 25, 1980. Traveled to: Omaha, Nebraska, Joslyn Art Museum, July 25–September 14, 1980; St. Petersburg, Florida, Museum of Fine Arts of St. Petersburg, Inc., September 28–November 9, 1980; Columbus, Ohio, Columbus Museum of Art, December 8, 1980–January 15, 1981; Colorado Springs, Colorado, Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, February 1–March 21, 1981; Reno, Nevada, Sierra Nevada Museum of Art, April 11–May 25, 1981.
- Tampa, Florida, University of South Florida, USF Art Galleries, "Artists from the John Weber Gallery, NYC," November 3–December 13, 1980. Traveled to: Miami, Florida, Florida International University, Visual Arts Gallery, January 9–30, 1981.
- Boston, Massachusetts, Institute of Contemporary Art, "Geometric Abstraction," January 13–March 8, 1981.
- New York City, Sidney Janis Gallery, "30 Artists in a Corporate Collection: Selected by Sam Hunter," February 12–March 7, 1981.
- Boston, Massachusetts, Sunny Savage Gallery, "Ten Artists from New York," 1982.

cover: 11. *Untitled*, 1983, Oil on paper, 42½ x 45",
Courtesy John Weber Gallery, New York City.

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